

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Commission

Tuesday, April 17, 2012

Alexandria City Hall

Members:

Present: Kent Barnekov, Alexandria Seaport Foundation
Gina Baum, Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission
Christine Bernstein, Founders Park Community Association
Linda Hafer, Old Town Business and Professional Association
Charlotte Hall, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
Nathan Macek, At-large citizen and Chair
Jody Manor, Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA)
Peter Pennington, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)
Paul Smedberg, Alexandria City Council
Stephen Thayer, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of King St.
Townsend A. (Van) Van Fleet, Old Town Civic Association
Christa Watters, Citizen east of Washington St. and north of Pendleton St.

Excused: Arthur Fox, Citizen east of Washington St. and south of King St.
Doug Gosnell, Alexandria Marina pleasure boat lease holder
James McCall, Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC)

City Staff: Rashad M. Young, City Manager
Jack Browand, Acting Deputy Director, Parks Operations, Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Faroll Hamer, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning (P&Z)
Jim Hixon, Dockmaster, RPCA
Cheryl Lawrence, Acting Division Chief, RPCA
Sandra Marks Division Chief, Transportation Planning Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES)
Jennifer Nettles, Department of General Services (DGA)
John North, Alexandria Fire Department
Carrie Sanders, T&ES
Lt. Juan Torres, Alexandria Police Department (APD)
Nancy Williams, Principal Planner, P&Z

Guests: Brian Buzzell
Susan Cohen, Public Art Committee
Joanne Platt

Welcome and Introductions

The Commission was called to order at 7:30 a.m. and members and guests introduced themselves.

Greetings from City Manager

Young welcomed the Commission following its conversion from committee to commission. He said he looked forward to working with the Commission and would be considering over the next several months how to incorporate into the City's plans for the Waterfront the variety of recommendations that the Waterfront Committee had made over time.

Approval of Minutes from March 20, 2012 and March 26, 2012 Meetings

Moved by Hafer, seconded by Watters to approve the summary minutes of the March 20, 2012 and March 26, 2012 meetings as drafted. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Report from Police Department

Torres reported that larcenies from restaurants and restaurant customers had risen recently and eight related arrests in the area of King Street and the Strand had been made during the previous two weeks. He said officers would continue to patrol the area and reported that one arrest had been made related to recent larcenies of UPS and FedEx packages.

In response to a concern that officers do not always intervene when they see bicycle riders violate traffic rules, Torres said that whenever officers witness traffic violations, including intermodal traffic problems, they are expected to address them. Van Fleet and Bernstein said pedestrian-vehicle traffic conflicts continue to be a special concern near the King and Union Street intersection and said having an officer stationed there to disperse traffic would help address the problem. Torres said he would recommend that an officer patrol the King Street/Union Street intersection.

Report from Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities

Marina Pilings

Browand reported that the City had completed all steps necessary for work to proceed on the nine pilings, vendors had been contracted, materials procured and work scope set. He said the project's completion timetable would be provided for the Commission's next meeting.

Minnie V

Browand reported that the Potomac Riverboat Company (PRC) would begin offering passenger tours from the Marina on the historic skipjack Minnie V in May. Hall distributed PRC brochures for the tours. Initially tours would be offered on Saturdays and Sundays and, beginning May 25, on a Friday-Saturday-Sunday summer schedule. Browand said that, as previously reported, the City would review the Minnie V docking agreement as its one-year trial period concludes.

Food Court Public Restrooms

Browand reported that it had proven more problematic than expected to make the restrooms at the privately managed Food Court available as public restrooms. Concerns

have focused on cost and security, especially the potential costs of actions needed to ensure safe access during evening hours since corridors leading to the restrooms are lightly traveled and the Food Court has multiple entrances. Browand noted that without continuous guards being stationed in an area, restrooms are most safely located in places with substantial visitor traffic. Also, because the Food Court is a privately managed facility, responsibility for maintenance costs and liability would need to be clarified.

Staff is instead considering whether public restrooms available within two to three blocks of the Marina, such as those at the Ramsay House Visitor Center and Torpedo Factory Art Center, are adequate to support visitors to the Marina area. Browand reported that, depending on the time of year, the Marina is open approximately one to four hours longer than the Torpedo Factory. Also, although expanding public access to the Torpedo Factory's first floor restrooms is an option, they would be unavailable when special events are held because the area is used for staging. As an additional option, staff will verify whether public restrooms are available at the City's Union Street parking garage and, if so, hours of availability.

Pennington said maintenance and safe access issues should be incorporated into planning for how the Food Court restrooms could be used as public restrooms, not used as a reason to rule out the option. He said using technology such as well-publicized security cameras and enhanced lighting should be considered as ways to address security.

Commissioners said providing adequate public restrooms for Marina visitors, including signage, should be a priority, especially since many families visit the area. Smedberg noted that Council receives complaints about there being too few available public restrooms. Barnekov reported that Waterfront visitors often stop by the Seaport Foundation looking for restrooms. Hixon said that when the Marina remains open until 9 p.m. 3,000 to 4,000 people visit the area each evening on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Commissioners said providing a long-term solution for providing convenient Waterfront public restrooms remains a significant concern and one they have called attention to over time. Watters said New York City's Bryant Park restroom offered an excellent example with constantly staffed, well-maintained and well-lit facilities. Buzzell said the Belle Haven Park restrooms, managed by the National Park Service (NPS), are another example. Macek noted that NPS would be opening a similar facility at Jones Point Park. Commissioners briefly discussed Porta-Johns as a possible short-term solution, particularly for special events, but were concerned that they may become a long-term fixture. Browand noted that Porta-Johns would need to be relocated when the Marina area floods.

Browand said RPCA will continue its discussions with other City agencies regarding public restroom options for the Waterfront area, including the need to add restroom

locations to dock signage and to add signage for restrooms in the City Hall and Torpedo Factory area.

Waterfront-Area Special Events

Browand and Lawrence provided Commissioners a working list of special events being planned for the Old Town Area and Waterfront District and said that events, once approved, are posted to the City web site's calendar page. Macek noted that the City Jazz Festival, to be held at Waterfront Park rather than its previous Fort Ward Park venue, is among the summer events being planned for Waterfront area parks.

Fire Boat Relocation

Browand reported that the fireboat will be relocated slightly east of its current mooring in the Marina and the new City fireboat, a 50-foot vessel, could be in place by the end of the year. Delivery of the vessel will need to occur prior to the freezing of the waterways from Canada, where the new fire boat is being manufactured. If the vessel is not ready by this time, likely delivery will be delayed until Spring 2013. North said that because the City had received a \$1.2 million federal Port Security Grant to purchase the new fireboat no City funds had been required. The new boat would provide the Waterfront substantially enhanced firefighting and rescue capabilities, with an 8,000 gallon/minute pumping capability that compares to the current City fireboat's 2,000 gallon/minute capability. A floating dock at the side of the pier is planned and a design team is considering the most appropriate position for mooring the fire boat on a temporary basis. The fireboat would also be able to shoot colored display sprays when desired.

Windmill Hill Park Bulkhead

Browand reviewed the implementation recommendations for the Windmill Hill Park Concept Plan, the elements completed since the Plan's 2002 approval and those planned, funding available for the work, and details regarding the deteriorating bulkhead. He said the same information would be provided to the Park and Recreation Commission on April 19.

Browand said the City's first priority is the installation of a safety fence to prohibit access to the bulkhead until funding is available to replace it. Browand reported that approximately \$1.35 million in funding is available for Windmill Park improvements. Staff has dedicated an estimated \$25,000 to install the recommended safety fence, recommended in March 2012 by the consultant resulting from a condition analysis of the Windmill Hill Bulkhead, and that approximately \$1 million has been set aside for the study and design of a new bulkhead. A stockade or chain link fence is not being considered for a safety fence and Browand provided an example of the type of fence that doesn't block the viewshed and that would require a conscious effort to climb or otherwise surmount it. Browand said the fence would encircle the three sides of the bulkhead to prohibit access to the deteriorating structure. Staff said the Old and Historic District Board of Architectural Review (BAR) would likely consider the proposed fence at one of its June meeting dates and installation of the fence is expected this summer.

Browand reviewed approved Concept Plan elements that could be implemented in Windmill Hill Park without being impacted by the bulkhead project. These enhancements include family-oriented park furniture, replacement of park perimeter fencing west of Union Street, playground renovation, and installation of dog park enhancements.

Browand reported that recommended pedestrian safety measures on Union Street will be deferred until completion of the Union Street Corridor Circulation Study. Data collection for the study is expected to begin in May 2012. Smedberg suggested that because calming is currently needed where the tunnel crosses to the park, installing a pedestrian crossing now would alert drivers to pedestrians heading to the park.

Smedberg asked whether the idea had been considered to remove rather than renovate the Windmill Hill Park basketball courts in light of the two new Jones Point Park courts that would soon be available. Browand said the removal of the basketball court has not been discussed.

Members discussed whether, because interest in the value of natural shorelines had increased since the Windmill Hill Park Plan was passed in 2002, it might no longer be appropriate to repair and/or restore the bulkhead. Pennington said that, rather than preventing access to the bulkhead, it might be more appropriate to break it up and leave its pieces in situ, available for use as rip rap that could be incorporated into a natural shoreline for the park.

Watters asked whether the City's decision not to make funds available until FY2016 for repairing or replacing the bulkhead, as approved in the 2002 plan, indicated doubts among City staff regarding the value of doing so. Macek noted that Waterfront Commission members had repeatedly urged in recent years that, for safety reasons, funds be made available to repair or replace the bulkhead.

Commissioners asked whether the bulkhead could be broken up now, as a first step towards a permanent solution to the bulkhead problem, instead of installing a safety fence to deter access to the deteriorated bulkhead. Browand said that if a decision were made supporting a preference for a natural shoreline for Windmill Hill Park rather than replacement of the bulkhead, this new option would need to be thoroughly reviewed, including its cost implications. Buzzell said that because the bulkhead area includes old underground fuel tanks used by the marina previously located there, a full survey of the area would be needed to determine the tanks' precise locations, especially because concrete in the bulkhead area had settled over the years.

There was consensus among Commissioners that because of the risks posed by the deteriorating bulkhead, signage should be installed that makes clear the dangers of the site and that, although the bulkhead could not be removed now instead of installing a temporary safety fence around it, the idea should be considered as an alternative to the plans for the bulkhead approved in 2002.

Macek reminded Commissioners that the Commission's annual Waterfront Walk, set for June 9, would begin at the Windmill Hill Park bulkhead and encouraged Commissioners to convey their individual concerns about Windmill Hill Park to Council members.

In response to a question of why non-City funding for the repairs had not been pursued, Smedberg said that Congressman Moran had worked for a number years to identify potential federal funding sources for the project, but that the project does not qualify for the competitive federal grants that are available.. Macek noted that unlike other states, such as Michigan, Virginia provides limited state funding for marine or safe harbor projects.

Report on Waterfront Plan Implementation

Waterfront-area Capital Bikeshare Station Locations

Sanders provided an update on the Bikeshare program. She said that for the City's initial one-year pilot program, eight docking stations are planned for locations throughout the City, including one for the Waterfront area at Cameron Street Alley. Stations are planned for the Metrorail stations and key destinations throughout Old Town. She said T&ES had considered a variety of factors when evaluating specific docking locations, including pedestrian safety, impact on parking, access to bicycle routes, suitability for hosting a solar-powered station, separation from utilities, and flood potential. Docking stations are closed during flooding. The 15- to 19-dock stations are modular and movable.

Thayer and other members raised significant concerns about locating a docking station in Cameron Street Alley since bicycle riding in this Waterfront area is prohibited. Macek said that because Bikeshare riders travel point-to-point, the stations need to be at places appropriate for parking bicycles and that a station near the Waterfront would be important as an interceptor for users to dock bicycles rather than ride them in Waterfront parks.

Commissioners were concerned about potential risks of increasing bicycle traffic in such a pedestrian-heavy location and having a Bikeshare docking station in a location that could be used by emergency vehicles to respond to emergency events in the Marina area. Sanders agreed that signage warning against riding bicycles along the need to be increased and said a full range of issues had been considered during the review of potential Waterfront-area docking sites. In response to questions about Bikeshare's potential impact on bicycle traffic along Union Street, Marks said this would be one of many factors incorporated within the scope of the recently approved Union Street Corridor Circulation Study that had been discussed with the Commission.

Smedberg said he shared the concerns about the Cameron Street Alley location and suggested Market Square as a possible alternative docking site. Sanders said a Market Square location is also planned but that a second nearby location would be needed to accommodate overflow from the popular Market Square location. Commissioners said

additional options for a Waterfront Bikeshare docking site, such as the City-owned Beachcomber site, should be considered.

Marks said the goal had been to locate a Bikeshare docking station at a site that would bring people directly to the Waterfront and noted that an ideal site would have been the foot of King Street but for its frequent flooding. She questioned whether the Beachcomber site would have the same flooding problem. In response to a question about whether two docking stations could be placed together at a site, Sanders said T&ES could not find a site that could accommodate that in light of the City's street grid and narrow streets.

Commissioners said they were disappointed that the detailed briefing on the docking sites had not been provided to them prior to the meeting so they could have considered it more carefully and indicated to staff any questions they might want to pursue at the meeting in more detail. Hall noted she had requested at the February Bikeshare briefing that additional details be provided as follow-up.

Sanders said the City's goal is to implement the Bikeshare pilot program by summer and that T&ES had been soliciting inputs from a variety of groups about the planned stations so modifications could be made as needed. She said the Transportation Commission, the Environmental Policy Commission, the BAR, and several civic associations had responded positively to the briefing's details. After the one-year trial period, data would be provided to Council about the response to and impact of the program.

Thayer said he supported the Bikeshare program but opposed the Cameron Street Alley docking site. Smedberg noted that, in response to City staff's excellent Bikeshare open houses and outreach events, Council had received many emails from residents, almost 90 percent of which had been positive. Hall said she supported having a Waterfront Bikeshare station at the Beachcomber site, that its parking lot is not subject to flooding and the 200 block of the Strand never floods. Marks said T&ES had not reviewed the Beachcomber site in detail because it was considered too far from the Waterfront. Macek suggested the Commission state it supported Bikeshare, considered a Waterfront location important, opposed the Cameron Street Alley location, and encouraged staff to consider alternative Waterfront locations.

Moved by Thayer, seconded by Van Fleet, that the Bikeshare program not include a station at the foot of Cameron Street Alley and that alternative sites be considered.

Alternative sites suggested by Commissioners included the Beachcomber parking lot, the unit block of Duke Street, and the unit block of Oronoco Street by Robinson Terminal North, and perhaps near the south side of the Old Dominion Boat Club parking lot.

The motion passed with 11 ayes, and one abstention (Pennington).

Commissioners briefly discussed the idea that locating a Bikeshare station at the Beachcomber site would be unlikely to have an adverse impact on the nearby bicycle rental business because Bikeshare's bikes are not suited for long-distance rides.

Union Street Corridor Circulation Study

Marks reported that Council had approved funding for the study the previous Saturday and the procurement process had begun. Data collection was expected to begin in May. She noted that T&ES had provided Commissioners a list of Commission recommendations for the study's scope that T&ES had incorporated into its scoping specifications.

Bernstein asked for a status report on T&ES' plan to re-install pedestrian paddle signs at the Union and Princess Street intersection as had been discussed at the Commission's March 26 meeting. Marks said T&ES planned to install the signs within the next two weeks.

Discussion: Waterfront Commission Organization

Macek asked Commissioners to consider for their May meeting several ideas related to how the Commission should organize itself to accommodate its expanded jurisdiction overseeing Waterfront Plan implementing actions

Macek proposed that the full Commission consider all Waterfront implementation actions and that the Marina Subcommittee be reconstituted as a standing Marina Committee to insure that Waterfront Plan implementation issues do not preempt the Commission's continuing Marina oversight. All Commission members would be de facto voting members of the Marina Committee. Recommendations from the Marina Committee would be forwarded to the full Commission for action. Macek invited Commissioners to contact him if they are interested in chairing the Marina Committee.

Macek reported that Council had added six new positions on the Commission, accepting the previous staff recommendation to add five new seats representing the Commission on the Arts, the Planning Commission, and three residential representatives, one from each of the City's three Park Planning Districts covering Old Town and Carlyle, Del Ray and Rosemont, and West of Quaker Lane. Macek said Council then added a sixth seat for the Historic Alexandria Foundation in response to its request for inclusion.

In response to Bernstein's question whether the Waterfront Commission would have representatives on other commissions; Macek said there might be a Waterfront Commission representative appointed to the Old Town Area Parking Study's Steering Committee. He noted that a benefit of having other commissions represented on the Waterfront Commission would be enhanced two-way communication between the Waterfront Commission and the commissions represented on it.

The regular May meeting was expected to be the next Commission meeting. Commission meetings are planned for June and August, in addition to the annual

Waterfront Walk on June 9. No July meeting had been planned and the August meeting would be the time to consider budget items.

Macek proposed a potential monthly meeting schedule for Commissioners to consider at the Commission's May meeting: that regular monthly Commission meetings remain on the third Tuesday morning of the month, and that a second day be held on the monthly schedule for an additional meeting when needed. The fourth Thursday of the month was suggested as a possibility.

There was an interest in having the second meeting start at 4 or 4:30 p.m. Commissioners agreed to defer decisions on the additional meeting's timing until the May meeting so that new Commissioners for the positions added to the Commission could participate in the discussion.

Announcements / Public Discussion

Van Fleet proposed that, in light of efforts over the years to rename Waterfront Park, the Commission should consider recommending that it be renamed John Fitzgerald Park, after General Washington's aide-de-camp. Baum asked Van Fleet for information that she could share with the Park and Recreation Commission. The Commission agreed to follow up on the idea.

Pennington announced that the Council has been working with City staff on issues related to the combined storm and sanitary sewers and the City's need to reduce its permissible pollution loading in creeks. He said he expects the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Commonwealth to ask the City to reduce such loading in three stages over the next 30 years, with reduction benchmarks of 5 percent, 35 percent, and 100 percent. City staff is considering the possibility of creating a permanent City commission to oversee these issues.

Pennington announced Earth Day activities to be held at Brenman Park on April 21.

Macek announced that the Waterfront Walk had been scheduled for June 9 at 10 a.m.

Macek announced that no Commission meeting is planned for July 2012.

Adjournment

Manor moved and Bernstein seconded that the meeting be adjourned. Without objection the meeting adjourned at 9:40 a.m.